



HEALTH  
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# 25 HAPPINESS- BOOSTING TIPS

by HEALTHMEANS

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Some might say that the purpose of life itself is to pursue happiness. With that mindset, happiness actually encompasses many things including a sense of meaning and purpose in life, daily positive emotions and healthy relationships. More specifically, happiness often refers to hedonic well-being (pleasure) and/or eudemonic well-being (personal growth, flourishing or doing what is worth doing) [1]. Generally, when we are seeking happiness, we desire both of these experiences. But beyond these two parts, happiness is often defined differently depending on whom you ask.

Young people report that excitement is more conducive to their happiness while older people report that peacefulness is more conducive to their happiness [2]. Happiness can also be thought of as a short-term or momentary experience of positive emotions, or it can be more of a broad sense that life feels good [3]. Happiness can also vary across different domains of life. We might be happy in our relationship but not in our job. Or we might be happy in our role as a mother but not happy in our role as a daughter [4]. Given the multiple definitions of happiness and the multiple types of happiness, one-hundred percent happiness all of the time is not a goal we should expect to achieve. In fact, valuing happiness too much can be counterproductive and leave us feeling like our goal of happiness is forever out of reach [5].

So what exactly should we do to be happier? There are lots of scientifically-supported techniques that can help us boost our happiness a little bit at a time. With consistent effort, these strategies can lead to big, impactful changes in our happiness and well-being. Let's look at 25 science-based strategies you can start using today.

# 1. GROW AND STRENGTHEN YOUR SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Developing strong, supportive social connections is one of the best things we can do for both our physical and emotional health. So important are our social connections that a sense of relatedness is considered to be an essential need, or a prerequisite for functioning, growth and well-being [6]. Social support helps us be more resilient in the face of stress, decrease our risk for some illnesses and increase our social capital (or goodwill from others) [7]. These are just a few of the reasons why strengthening our social bonds is important for happiness. So when seeking happiness, it's key to make time for important people in our lives, treat them well and remind them how important they are to us.



## 2. PRACTICE GENEROSITY

One of the most reliable ways to increase happiness is through generosity. Across many studies, it has been shown that people who buy gifts for others, donate to charity or give their time to others (e.g., by volunteering) tend to be happier. This is generally true of people from all social classes and all ages [8].

The inverse is also true—selfishness is associated with unhappiness. For example, one laboratory study showed that stealing was associated with lower happiness [8]. Given how strong this research is, many in the field believe that generosity, or any kind of kindness, is the thing that is most likely to contribute to happiness.

## 3. MEDITATE ON POSITIVE FEELINGS TOWARDS OTHERS



You might have already heard about mindfulness meditation. But have you heard about loving-kindness meditation? Loving-kindness meditation involves generating love and compassion, first toward yourself, then loved ones, acquaintances, strangers and then all living beings. This type of meditation has been shown to increase daily experiences of positive emotion over time and to contribute to other positive outcomes like purpose and social support [9]. Adding this type of meditation into your routine may be a good way to increase happiness.

## 4. PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Did you know that gratitude is good for you? That's right. The more gratitude (or appreciation or thankfulness) we feel, the happier we tend to be. Grateful thinking even improves mood [10]. Luckily, there are a number of ways we can build and boost our gratitude. For example, writing about how we're grateful for a past experience has been shown to increase happiness [11]. Other effective practices include writing a gratitude journal to track things you're grateful for and writing a gratitude letter to express gratitude to someone you're grateful for [12].



## 5. GIVE OTHERS YOUR TRUST

Those of us who are less trusting of others are usually trying to protect ourselves from being hurt or feeling bad in the future. But ironically, by not giving our trust to others we end up creating some of the exact feelings we hope to avoid. Although the evidence suggests that happiness leads to more trust, trust also leads to more happiness. It seems that the experience of non-trusting puts us in a bad mood [8]. So if you're someone who has a hard time trusting, push yourself to trust people a little bit more until you get more comfortable with trusting others fully.

## 6. FIND PURPOSE



### Discover Who You Are

Purpose in life has been strongly linked to happiness [13]. But how, exactly, do we find our purpose(s)? One study suggests that there are four different types of purpose-seeking styles.

#### THESE ARE PROSOCIAL, CREATIVE, FINANCIAL AND PERSONAL RECOGNITION [14].

- **PROSOCIAL ORIENTATION.** One's propensity to help others and influence the societal structure.
- **FINANCIAL ORIENTATION.** Goals of financial well-being and administrative success.
- **CREATIVE ORIENTATION.** Artistic goals and a propensity for originality.
- **PERSONAL RECOGNITION ORIENTATION.** One's desire for recognition and respect from colleagues.

Each of these types of purposes can potentially help us increase our happiness. However, the research suggests that the prosocial purpose-seeking style is the most beneficial. Specifically, getting involved in projects that help others in some way is good for well-being [14]. So if you're looking to pursue purpose, try to "give back" in ways that matter to you.

# 7. PURSUE MEANING IN LIFE

Meaning in life and life purpose are often thought to be the same thing, but the research suggests that meaning is a much bigger concept; purpose is one part of it. The factors that are thought to make up a meaningful life include values, principles, purpose, accomplishment and excitement [15].

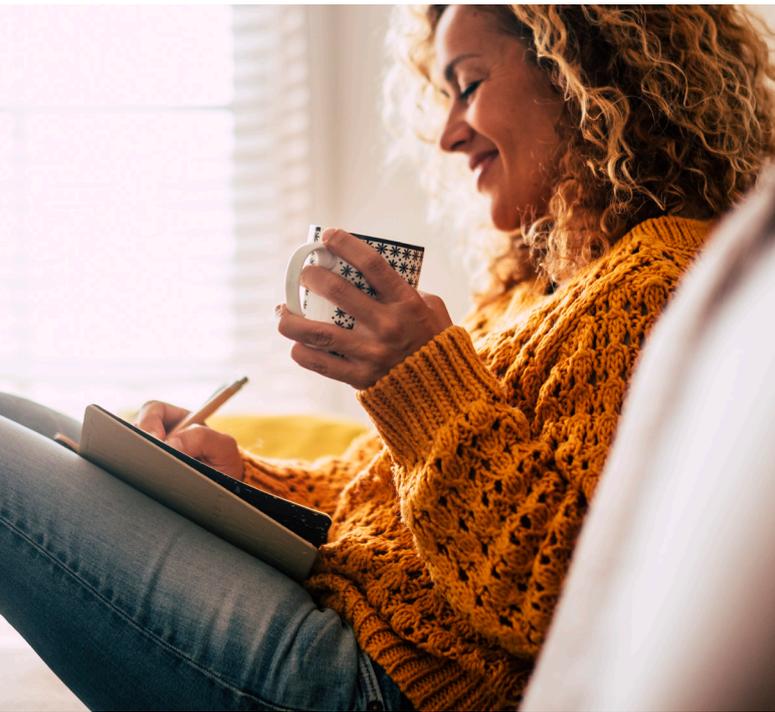


**EXPLORE EACH OF THESE DOMAINS TO GET A SENSE OF HOW FULFILLED YOU FEEL BY EACH:**

- **VALUING LIFE:** a sense of life's inherent value
- **LIVING BY PRINCIPLES:** a sense of having a personal philosophy or framework through which to understand life
- **PURPOSE:** a sense of having clear goals, aims and intentions
- **ACCOMPLISHMENT:** a sense that personal goals are being achieved or fulfilled
- **EXCITEMENT IN LIFE:** an enthusiastic orientation that views life as exciting, interesting or engaging

Each of these things individually contributes to a greater sense of meaning in life.

## 8. ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES YOU ENJOY



One of the most intuitive ways to increase happiness is by engaging in activities we enjoy. For example, we might engage in social activities, hobbies, goal-orientated activities or spiritual activities, all of which have the potential to increase our happiness [16]. In our modern, hectic lives, it's making time for these activities that's the challenge. We can help ourselves out by scheduling regular time for these things. For example, we might block out time in our calendar each week so we can plan to meet up with a friend on Sunday afternoons. By making plans that repeat each week or month, we're more likely to stick to them and we ensure that we actually do engage in the activities that bring us joy.

## 9. SHIFT YOUR ATTENTION

One of the most basic and effective strategies for experiencing more positive emotions (or less negative emotions) is to shift what we pay attention to [16]. This strategy is a little different than some of the other strategies we've talked about in that you can't do it ahead of time in hopes to increase happiness in the future. It's a strategy that is used in the present moment to increase happiness or reduce distress.

All we have to do is focus our attention on something that makes us feel better rather than focusing on things that make us feel worse. For example, if we're having a bad day at work, we might shift our attention to focus on the things we like about work, the people who will support us when we're upset or even the idea that the workday will end soon. By focusing our minds on fewer bad things are more good things, we have a greater chance to experience more happiness in each moment.

## 10. REMINISCE ON GOOD THINGS FROM THE PAST

Another way to increase our positive emotions in the present moment is to reminisce on good things that happened in the past to bring back the positive emotions that occurred at the time [16]. This technique is sometimes referred to as savoring. When we savor, we feel better and can even increase our happiness if we practice this strategy regularly.



## 11. ANTICIPATE POSITIVE FUTURE EVENTS

Another way to generate more positive emotions is to anticipate or look forward to future positive events [16]. We do this all the time when we look forward to big events like a wedding, retirement or a visit with family. To increase happiness, we can intentionally use this strategy for even more events, big or small. For example, we might make an effort to think about and look forward to things like our lunch break at work, meeting up with a friend for coffee or doing a favorite hobby. The goal here is to let any positive emotions we have about this future event bubble up to the surface so that we feel good before the event has even happened.

## 12. CHANGE YOUR APPRAISAL OF EVENTS

Some have speculated that emotions are not caused by events themselves, but rather by how these events are evaluated [17]. That means that we have a lot more power over our happiness than we realize. In fact, if we are able to reappraise, or reframe, an event as more positive or less negative, we can fundamentally change our experience of events in our lives [16].



For example, imagine you and a friend are driving together to a party and your car breaks down. There are many ways you could appraise this situation negatively: you'll miss the party, have to pay for a tow and repairs and have to wait on the side of the road for the tow truck to come. But, with some practice, you can learn to appraise negative events like these as positive. For example, you might feel grateful that you didn't get into an accident when your car malfunctioned. You might feel relief that you won't have to see certain people at the party. Or, you might feel excited that you get to spend this one-on-one time with your friend. Changing your perspective can be a fantastic tool for increasing happiness and well-being.

# 13. SMILE AND LAUGH

Another happiness-boosting strategy is to lighten the mood. For example, if we're feeling stressed about something, instead of worrying about it, we might try to smile, laugh or act goofy. Seriousness can lead to stress, so making an effort to let things go, laugh it off, and be humorous can be a very effective way to cope with stress and overcome negative emotions. Humor not only increases happiness in the shorter-term, but it can also have benefits for our health and happiness in the longer-term [16].



# 14. ACCEPT YOURSELF

Much of what makes us unhappy comes from inside our heads—from the ways we think, evaluate and judge our experiences. Judging ourselves harshly or thinking negative thoughts about ourselves can be especially problematic. Recent research highlights just how important self-acceptance is for not only happiness but also for other positive thought patterns like optimism [17].

If you find that you're having negative thoughts about yourself, try to challenge these thoughts. Remind yourself that we are all different and that's okay. Or practice using self-accepting affirmations like, "I love myself for exactly who I am." By continuing to train yourself to think in this way, you may be able to boost your self-acceptance and your happiness.



# 15. PROCESS THE DAY THROUGH JOURNALING

Journaling is thought to be a useful tool for all sorts of things. When it comes to happiness, a few different types of journaling have been shown to be beneficial. One way to journal for happiness involves writing about positive events—for example, write three good things that happened today. On bad days, it may be more helpful to write about what happened, make sense of it and try to see if any positives can come from the situation [18]. Using these science-based journaling strategies regularly can be a way to shift your perspective in ways that benefit your well-being.

## 16. CAPITALIZE ON THE MOMENT

Capitalizing is all about communicating and celebrating positive events with others. Capitalizing has been shown to lead to additional positive emotions, even more than the positive emotions that come from the event itself [19]. To capitalize on an event in your life, share your positive moments with others. You could send them a message to share good news or invite people over to celebrate an accomplishment. Taking advantage of these opportunities is not only good for your happiness, but also your relationships.



## 17. SEEK OUT THE EMOTIONS YOU WANT TO FEEL

You might expect that the more pleasant emotions you experience, the happier you would be. Well, it turns out that happier people are the people who experience the emotions they want to experience, regardless of whether those are positive or negative emotions. For example, experiencing excitement was associated with greater life satisfaction for people high in sensation seeking [20]. All this is to say that striving to experience emotions that “feel right” to you rather than experiencing emotions that “feel pleasant” is a better strategy for optimizing happiness. This suggests that it’s worth thinking a bit about the emotions you want to experience and how you can experience them more.

## 18. FORGIVE

When we're holding onto negative emotions directed toward another person, we aren't hurting them; we're hurting ourselves. When we are forgiving, we basically reduce our own stress. But if we are not forgiving, we harbor negative emotions and stress. Failure to forgive has been linked to negative outcomes like depression while the ability to forgive is linked to positive emotions and self-esteem [21]. It is thought that these changes in mental health have downstream effects for physical health and explain why forgiveness is related to better physical health. So if you're holding onto any grudges, see if you can find ways to get past them.



## 19. SPEND MONEY ON TIME

We now know that more money does not equal more happiness. So what does buy happiness? Given we live in an always-attached, hyper-busy world, a recent study explored whether spending money on time-saving purchases reduced time-stress and increased happiness. Indeed, time-saving purchases were more closely linked to life satisfaction than material purchases [22]. This suggests that the way we spend our money can crucially impact how happy we are. For example, we might hire someone to clean our house or buy an app to auto-schedule appointments. By freeing ourselves up to spend more time doing the things that make us happy, the happier we are likely to be.

## 20. CONNECT WITH NATURE



You may have heard that spending time outdoors in nature is good for well-being. Indeed that is true. Further, a sense of connection to nature is related to positive emotions, life satisfaction and vitality. Researchers suggest this may be because most of us are now so disconnected and far away from nature that even a little bit makes a big impact on our well-being [23]. To become more connected with nature may not take much. Taking short walks outdoors, starting a small garden or volunteering at a farm may be some ways to become more connected to nature.

## 21. LIMIT SOCIAL MEDIA TIME

You may have heard that using social media can hurt your happiness and well-being. Indeed, research suggests that for many, social media is not so good. Recent research explored when and why social media may be problematic and found that passive viewing of social media, in particular, was bad for happiness. Scrolling through other people's posts or content without participating often provokes social comparisons and envy, experiences which harm well-being. In contrast, when social media is used actively to engage with others, it promotes feelings of social connectedness [24]. So, it can be helpful to limit passive viewing of social media and if you do choose to use social media, do so in ways that strengthen your connections.

## 22. GET SOME EXERCISE

Exercise is consistently linked to numerous positive outcomes including happiness. As little as 10 minutes of physical activity per week may be enough to increase happiness, at least a little bit. It doesn't seem to matter whether we do aerobic exercise or stretching. It also doesn't seem to matter whether the exercise is light, moderate or vigorous [25]. All this is to say, doing any exercise regularly is very likely to help you increase your happiness.

## 23. EAT HAPPINESS-BOOSTING FOODS

Although we might choose to eat sweets or junk food when we're feeling upset, this isn't generally a good idea. The research shows that on days when we eat more fruits and vegetables, we tend to feel happier and more energetic. These positive feelings also tend to extend to the next day [26]. Moreover, fruit and veggie consumption in the present year is linked to greater well-being in the future [27]. This suggests that we can modify our mood and increase our happiness quite a bit by changing our diet.



## 24. SWITCH IT UP

Have you heard the expression, “Variety is the spice of life”? Indeed, humans have an intrinsic need for stimulation. So we sense intuitively that doing a variety of different things is good. Well, there is research to back up this approach. Specifically, doing a variety of activities each day increases happiness. We also enjoy experiences like watching TV or listening to music more when they include more variety [28]. This suggests that just switching up your routine a little bit each day can give you a happiness boost.



## 25. INVEST IN YOUR GOAL TO INCREASE YOUR HAPPINESS

Achieving happiness, just like any other goal, requires motivation and effort. We have to actually want to be happier and believe in what we’re doing to get happier. If we’re not motivated to do it or don’t put in the required effort, we’ll be less likely to succeed in reaching our happiness goals. For example, in one study, two groups of participants underwent an intervention designed to increase happiness. One group was told they were in a “happiness intervention.” The other group was told they were doing “cognitive exercises.” Even though the intervention was the same, the group that was in the “happiness intervention” showed greater increases in happiness. It seemed that this group was more invested in increasing their happiness, therefore they did [29].

# SUMMARY

The strategies presented here can be used alone or in combination to increase happiness. In general, the more of them you use, and the more frequently you use them, the happier you are likely to be.





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